

## 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Ordinary Time – Cycle B – Catechetical Sunday 2009

If you've ever checked your luggage at an airport, you'll appreciate this true story. A man was in a long line to check his luggage and he was getting very upset because it was moving so slowly. He got so angry that he went to the front of the line and yelled at the attendant behind the counter: "I shouldn't have to wait in this line...I've got first class tickets."...The attendant patiently explained to him that he had to wait his turn, but he didn't want to hear it...Finally, he shouted, "Do you know who I am?"...The quick-thinking attendant immediately picked up the microphone and announced, "Attention, we have a gentleman here who doesn't know who he is. If anyone can identify him, please come to the check-in counter."...Don't we just love it when someone who thinks they're more important or better than anyone else gets their comeuppance....gets put in their place?

In the Gospel we see how Jesus deals with this kind of attitude among His own disciples after He hears them arguing about which of them is the greatest...He does it a little differently than the airport attendant...He uses the situation as a teachable moment with a teaching that's as radical as anything He ever said: "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be last of all and the servant of all."...In other words, "You wanna be great, then become a servant of others." ...Greatness in the Kingdom of God is all about serving...all about giving...all about others. The great people in the Kingdom of God are not the ones who make the most money, or the ones who have the most power, or the ones who have the most talent,...The great ones in the Kingdom of God are those use whatever resources and talents and gifts they have been given – great or small – to serve their brothers and sisters.

For us, to follow Christ is to serve others... to live as He lived...It goes back to something else He said to His apostles: "I came not to be served, but to serve...to give my life as a ransom for many."... and that's what He did...He let His enemies arrest Him...tear open His back w whips, crown His head with thorns,...nail Him to a tree,...and curse Him until He gasped His life away.

Now if we look at that beaten, bloody figure on the cross, does the word *great* or the word *leader* come to mind?...By our world's standards, that's no great leader up there...that's a loser...a pathetic, misguided loser...Why would a great leader let that happen to Him? ...Why? Because He loved every man, woman and child He had created in His image;...because He wanted to experience what He knew they were going through;...because He cared – cared enough to live for others and to die for them...Because without His caring, the whole world would literally have gone to hell....This is the caring He wanted those first disciples to imitate...This is the caring He wants us - if we are truly His disciples – to imitate.

To get this message across to those status seeking disciples, Jesus did something only an extraordinary teacher would do...Instead of chewing them out for being so self-centered (like you and I would have done), He took a little child, held it up for them to see and said: "Whoever welcomes a child such as this welcomes me...and welcomes Him who sent me."...Now the status of children back then was much different than today...In Jesus' time, children had no rights,...no legal standing...no voice...They were non-people. They didn't matter. ...They didn't count...What Jesus was essentially saying was, "How you treat those who are on the lowest rung of the ladder, ...who have no power ...no influence...who can do nothing for you in return. ...How you treat them,...is how you treat Me and My Father."....Again, Jesus is calling His followers to a life of service...a life of giving to others...of doing for others...without regard for rank or status or importance.

My friends, if we truly believe Jesus is who He says He is...and if we truly believe He did all that the Bible tells us He did,...then how can we do anything less than be the servant to one another that He has been to us?....This weekend we are recognizing some people in our parish who are wonderful examples of Christian service...great examples of Christian stewardship: our catechists/ teachers in the School of Religion. ...Cathy Tocci, our Director of Religious Education will now tell us how these generous folks are answering Christ's call to be GREAT in the Kingdom of God by using their talents, their gifts to serve others.

Deacon Ron...you are so right when you say that the folks we are honoring and thanking this weekend (our teachers in our School of Religion) are wonderful examples of service-because they are —their service is to our children, to our parish and to our God. They are true steward of the treasure that is our faith.

Each week the men and women (65 of them) who make up the volunteer faculty of our Father Kelly School of Religion share their faith with our children from Pre school through high school. Our teachers come in all shapes and sizes..and they come from different walks and different stages of life. One of our teachers is an "original". She actually taught at the Fr. Kelly School of Religion when Father Kelly was still around to direct it. After sharing her faith with several generations of parish young people, she "retired" and moved away...and one of the first things she did when she and her husband moved back to Fairport a few years ago was to call me and say, "I want to teach religion again." I'm not gonna tell her age...but Fr. Kelly founded the SoR over 50 years ago....you do the math. On the other end of the spectrum are two of our teen teacher aides who were just confirmed in June. They are just beginning to live out their commitment to be strong witnesses for their faith. And there are so many folks in between. They are stay at home moms & dads and working moms & dads....grammas & grampas, high school students and college students. They are nurses and teachers and salesmen and retired folks. What brings them together is their love for our faith and their love for our children. Each one of them is responding to Jesus' call in today's gospel to become His fellow servant. Each one of them is a steward of the treasure that is our faith.

Their job as religion teachers is to share their faith with our young people..to help them understand it and come to find joy in it....to help them not only to know **about** God, but to actually come to **know** God as loving, caring and ever present in their lives.

So, how do they do that? How do they make God's Word come alive? How do they make faith real? How does this faith that we love get passed on to those who come after us? Well, I recently got the answer to that question from one of the little ones in my life....and I was reminded of that by today's gospel message. Jesus tells us that whoever welcomes a child welcomes Him..... that is so right on! He so often sends little ones to us adults to help us to see the things He wants us to see.

A couple of weeks ago, our granddaughters (and their parents) visited us from Seattle. It was a magical week for us....playing with our new baby, Inara, and interacting with our 6 year old, Thalia. Part of Thalia's bedtime routine is storytime. She gets to pick the book and the storyteller each night. So...it's my turn and we take a bunch of books upstairs and she picks a book....not the "Hungry Caterpillar" or one of the Tinker Fairies books, but the children's bible....and we start reading. Well..here's the thing....story time with Thalia doesn't just mean just reading the story....it means getting into the story....as she says, "being in the pages".....acting it out. So...we're reading through the children's bible....and we get to the story of the Loaves and the fishes..which she loves because of there's a little boy in it and he's kind of a hero....but she thinks that maybe the kid with the basket might really be a

girl....and then she says, "Ok, Nannie...let's do it..." "You be Jesus....teach me" ....and I pretend to be Jesus and teach her....I tell her what he tells us...to love God and everybody else...to be kind...to say she's sorry when she hurts someone....and to forgive someone who makes her feel bad....I think I'm done...and she says, "Feed me...like Jesus fed the people in the story" .....and we did the thing with the pretend loaves and fishes...and I try to connect the food in the little boys' basket with the bread of life that is truly feeds us.

I fell asleep that night with Thalia's words running thru my head: "Be Jesus.....teach me.....Be Jesus...feed me." And I realized this is exactly what God calls our teachers to do... to **be Jesus** for those he sends to them...to **teach** our young ones about him...to **feed** their hunger to know more about how God is right there in their lives & in the world. Our teachers respond to this call by passing on the teachings, beliefs and traditions of our Catholic faith...not only from textbooks...not only from the Bible...but by letting their students hear their own faith stories...by letting their faith, their belief, their love for Jesus.....what's in their hearts ....shine through to the young people in their classes.

Today, as we thank and recognize these folks who are committed to the faith formation of our children in our parish, we need to remember also that a child's faith development doesn't begin when he or she is registered for the SoR, and it shouldn't end on that child's Confirmation Day. It begins when a child first feels the total love and acceptance of God in the total love and acceptance of a caring, loving family...and it continues as each person in that child's life...parents, grandparents, aunts & uncles, godparents, friends, and parish family....including religion teachers...**together** help that child's faith grow and develop by the example of their own lives of faith. Each one of us should hear those words..."**Be Jesus...teach me.**" "**Be Jesus....feed me.**"

Today, as we bless our teaches and send them forth to begin a new SoR year, we thank them for their faithfulness, for their commitment and for the love they have for our faith and for our children. We thank them for accepting Jesus' call to servanthood. Let us also support them with our prayers....not only this weekend, but throughout the year.

Amen.....call them up.